

**NORTHWEST**news

**O**n a gloomy, rainy day in Portland, dining in Bridges Cafe & Catering is as uplifting to the spirit as it is to the palate.

The first impression is welcoming; housed in an old Victorian-style building, the establishment stands out from nearby drab buildings with its homey brick facade and dark green awnings. Inside, the walls are painted in bold swaths of yellows, reds and blues—a warm contrast to the grays outside.

Owner Terry Dempsey met with *Just Out* recently for a chat about his business. At 10 a.m., the place is packed; most of the 11 tables are filled.

The clientele is diverse. In most coffeehouse-style cafes the diners are young and white; Bridges also attracts older people and African Americans. "It reflects the diversity of the neighborhood, of Northeast Portland," Dempsey notes.

Although Bridges has been around for six years, he is a relatively new owner, having purchased it in March 2000. He moved from San Francisco earlier that year to be with his family.

"I wasn't sure what I was going to do here, so I called a business broker and started looking at restaurants," Dempsey reveals. His background as a resident chef in a cathedral and as a caterer for a law firm prepared him for owning his first eatery.

With the cafe also came a catering business. "Catering is one-third of my business," Dempsey explains.

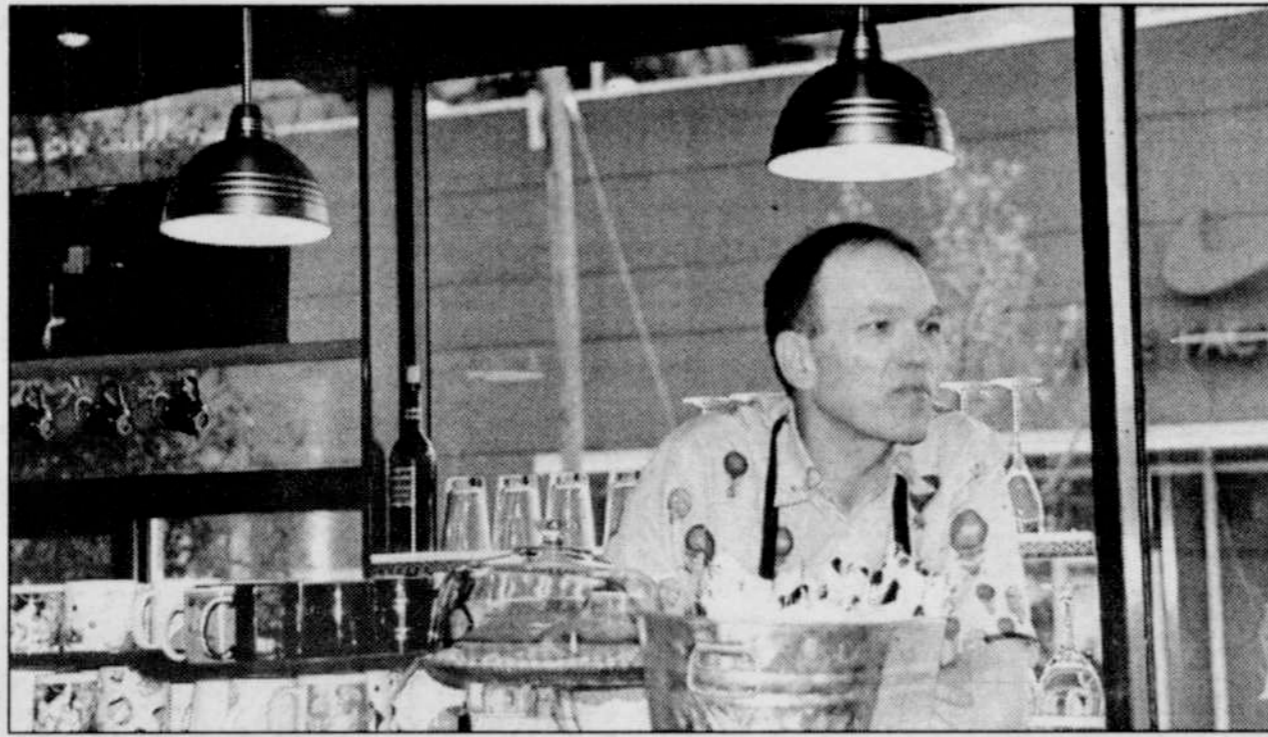
And he has some impressive clients. "We do all the catering for Multnomah County HIV Services and some catering for Cascade AIDS Project."

Dempsey is also one of three preferred caterers at Montgomery Park and a preferred caterer for Marriott. Asked how he acquires clients for his business, especially of that magnitude, he replies: "By word of

# A GOOD NEIGHBOR

**As Northeast Portland thrives, so does Bridges Cafe & Catering**

by Natalie Shapiro



Terry Dempsey says Northeast Portland is becoming more of a destination for food

mouth, advertising in *Just Out* and some other ways. Montgomery Park just called out of the blue." The cafe also plays host to catering events in the evening after closing for regular business.

Dempsey attributes at least some of his success to his personalized approach. "My catering is very customized. I ask what their ideas are, come up with a proposal on menu items and budget and fax it to them."

Asked about the success of the cafe itself, he responds with modest pride. "Business has grown phenomenally since I started. Sales have increased by about 150 percent."

This is partly because of the food's improved quality and consistency. "We also added specials, such as vegetarian breakfasts, which appeal to a wide range of dietary interests," Dempsey says.

Another reason for the cafe's success, he

adds, is the changing neighborhood, which now includes hot spots such as Billy Reed's Restaurant & Bar up the street. "Northeast Portland is becoming more of a destination for food."

As the proprietor of a gay-owned business, does Dempsey feel supported by the sexual minorities community? He nods. "And with my catering business," he adds. He gives back to the community by donating part of his profits on a given evening to Basic Rights Oregon.

So what is the food like? What is popular? Dempsey beckons the server, Katey Allsup, who comments enthusiastically. "Customers are really into the bread and Benedicts," she says. "The most-ordered things are basic breakfasts."

Bridges serves breakfast and lunch only. Menu items include black bean cakes, fresh cornmeal bread from Delphina's Bakery, biscuits and gravy, a plethora of gourmet and basic sandwiches, several kinds of eggs Benedict (including shrimp and salmon) and latkes (potato pancakes).

As for drinks, patrons can choose coffee, tea, juice or a selection of beer and wine. Bridges has no liquor license, which calls for some creative substituting, such as the sake margarita. "Mimosas are really popular," Dempsey notes.

With his success, what more could he do? "Open it up for dinner!" he states. His chef is developing a menu for the new evening hours. "We will offer moderately priced bistro foods such as pastas, soups and salads." ■

BRIDGES CAFE & CATERING, located at 2716 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., is open for breakfast and lunch from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. weekdays and from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. weekends.

NATALIE SHAPIRO is a food-loving dyke.

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